

Health of Towns Association.



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RESOLUTIONS ON THE BILL FOR IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF TOWNS IN ENGLAND, PREPARED AND BROUGHT IN BY VISCOUNT MORPETH, LORD JOHN RUSSELL, AND SIR GEORGE GREY. MARCH 30, 1847.

The Committee of the Health of Towns Association held a Meeting at the Statistical Society, 12 St. James's Square, on Wednesday, April 7th; LORD ASHLEY in the Chair; for the purpose of taking into consideration the "Bill for Improving the Health of Towns in England," presented to Parliament by Her Majesty's Government; when it was resolved unanimously:—

1. That this Bill is founded on the Bill, framed with great care and labour by the late Government, and presented to the House of Commons at the close of the session 1845, by the Earl of Lincoln and Sir James Graham.

2. That the main provisions of Lord Lincoln's Bill are based on the Recommendations of Her Majesty's Commissioners of the Health of Towns, being the conclusions at which they arrived after an investigation, seldom equalled in extent, and never exceeded by the fulness and completeness of the evidence collected.

3. That Lord Lincoln's Bill possesses the great merit of having developed a definite and universally applicable principle, by which the Recommendations of Her Majesty's Commissioners might be carried into practical operation, and a sound sanatory state be gradually extended to every city, town, and village of the United Kingdom.

4. That while both the former and the present governments have earnestly laboured to mature a comprehensive and efficient sanatory measure, it must give confidence in the principle on which it is proposed to legislate, that the measure presented to Parliament by both administrations is essentially the same, differing merely in the mode in which it is proposed to carry the Act into operation.

5. That the Bill prepared by her Majesty's present Government proposes to place the general superintendence of the Act in a special authority created for this express purpose; to assign the local execution of the Act to bodies already constituted, and from time immemorial empowered, to perform service of this kind; namely, the Town Councils; extending the jurisdiction of those bodies, where this may be necessary, by the creation of new wards, and affording facilities for the formation of such bodies where none at present exist; to place the main expense of improvement, (exercising every where a vigilant controul over the expenditure), on the classes that will most profit by it—namely, occupiers of houses; to raise in each district the capital that may be required, either by loan, or by persons contracting for the execution of the works, on the security of a special rate, the repayment of principal and interest, to be spread over a series of years, being commuted into an annual rent-charge; and in this manner to prevent the burthen from being practically felt even by the poorest tenant, and at the same time to ENGAGE AND REGULATE THE SPIRIT OF COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE IN THE EXECUTION OF MEASURES OF SANATORY IMPROVEMENT: provisions which the whole tenor of the evidence shews to be absolutely necessary to secure the efficient, general, economical, and permanent working of the measure.

6. That the Bills proposed, both by the late and the present Government, alike provide, that the supply of water, the sewerage, the drainage, the cleansing and the paving of towns, should be under one and the same authority; that the existing separate, independent, and often conflicting trusts and boards, being proved by experience to be uneconomical, often wasteful, and almost invariably inefficient, should be abolished; and that their duties and powers should be transferred to one single body; located, each in its assigned district; uniformly constituted, and always under supervision and controul.

7. That, with regard to the metropolis, after the full and repeated investigations which have been made into the sanatory condition of this important part of the empire—first by Drs. Arnott, Kay, and Southwood Smith; secondly, in the following year, by Dr. Southwood Smith; thirdly, by the Committee of the House of Commons appointed to inquire into the Health of Towns; fourthly, by Mr. Chadwick, as set forth in the Sanatory Report published in 1842; and, lastly, by the evidence of Commissioners and Officers of Sewers, of Engineers of Water Companies, and of large numbers of medical and other witnesses, collected under the Health of Towns' Commission, constituting altogether a mass of unanswerd and unanswerable facts, shewing the enormous and deplorable defects and abuses in the management of the Sewerage, the Drainage, the Supply of Water, and the Paving and Cleansing of the Metropolis—there can be no pretext on the part of these local authorities, that they have been taken by surprise; that they have proved, by any thing they have done in time past, or are likely to do in future, that they are better fitted for continuing in office, than similar bodies in other parts of the country; or that there is the shadow of reason why a special exception should be made in their favour, from the operation of any general law.

8. That among the practical results of the progress of the nation in art, science, and wealth, one of the most remarkable is the improvement that has taken place in the comfort and healthfulness of dwelling houses, and in the salubrity of the localities in which they are placed; that this, however, is true only of the houses and localities in which the higher and middle classes reside; that comparatively little of this improvement has descended to the class of shopkeepers; and still less to that of skilled artizans; while in general NO IMPROVEMENT WHATSOEVER has reached the dwellings of common or unskilled labourers, who form the bulk of the population, both of our town and rural districts; but that on the contrary, in consequence of the increase of the population, without a corresponding increase of house accommodation, and without attention to the cleanliness of the districts into which the poorer classes have been driven, the sanatory condition of those districts is positively worse than it was half a century ago; because they are more crowded, because the sources of the pollution of the air have proportionately increased, and because the access of fresh air has every year become more and more difficult: whence it has happened that the classes in question have been compelled to spend their lives, from the moment of birth to that of death, in a poisoned atmosphere, in which not only has the attainment of physical and mental health and strength been impossible, but the deterioration

of the body and the corruption of the mind have alike become inevitable.

9. That little or nothing of this state of things is known to the higher and wealthier classes, because no indications of it have been visible in our great squares, or our principal streets and common thoroughfares; but that, nevertheless, within a few paces of these spots, where every thing marks improvement, and indicates health and comfort, are the abodes of tens of thousands of the people, in a state which no one out of their own class can witness without a feeling of horror, and which people of all ranks, brought thither by curiosity or duty—statesmen, legislators, clergymen, medical men, and the officers of charitable institutions—all concur in declaring to be disgraceful to us, equally as a civilized and as a Christian nation.

10. That the consequences of this state of things are proclaimed to us daily by an indisputable and undisputed authority, though hitherto practically neglected—the Tables and Reports of the Registrar General,—whose columns shew, that in some of these places the mortality is double, and in others treble that of the wealthier districts; that the inhabitants of these neglected districts are deprived of one-third, and in many cases of one-half of the natural term of their existence; that during the very last year 50,000 persons in a part only of England, living chiefly in these districts, perished, over and above the ordinary numbers that die yearly; and that, from calculations based on the Returns of the Registrar General, it appears that the numbers that perish in England alone, from removable causes of sickness and mortality, amount to no less than 136 persons every day.

11. That although the sickness and mortality from these causes press with peculiar severity on the poorer classes, yet the wealthy are by no means exempt from similar suffering; that there is no boundary within which it is possible to confine the visitations of malaria, and no moment when it may not pass beyond its usual haunts; that it sometimes introduces fever and other painful and mortal diseases into the mansion as well as into the hovel, seizing upon young and old alike in both; and that the Returns uniformly shew that in those towns and cities which are remarkable for the early ages at which the poor die, the gentry also, as a class, are deprived of many years of their natural term of life.

12. That, according to the ordinary estimate, for every death there are twenty-eight persons sick; that the subjects of this excessive sickness and mortality are, exclusive of infants, persons in the prime of life, between the ages of twenty and forty—the period when life is of the greatest value to the individual and to society; when the poor have the largest number of children dependent on their labour for support; when sickness plunges entire families into temporary, and death into permanent destitution, and consequent dependence on parochial relief: that from Returns obtained under the Poor Law Commission, it appears that there are in this way produced and pauperized yearly, in England and Wales alone, upwards of forty-seven thousand widows, and upwards of one hundred and twenty thousand orphans; that from calculations, based on Registration Returns from the several counties in England and Wales, it appears that the loss in money on the year's deaths is in round numbers, from the loss of the productive power of the labourer, thirteen millions (£12,988,874) from sickness, a million and a half (£1,599,337), and from funerals nearly three hundred thousand pounds (£285,612), making a total loss to the country every year of nearly fifteen millions (£14,873,823) of money, by far the greater part of which enormous sum might and would be saved under proper sanatory regulations; and that after all this loss in money, and all this cost in sickness, suffering, and premature death, the population is not in the least degree diminished; a puny, sickly, suffering, and short-lived race invariably, and most rapidly springing up to supply the place of those that perish, and thus preparing every year, "an unripe harvest for the scythe of death!"

13. That it is therefore clear that there is a definite line at which the improvement of the people has stopped; beyond which the advantages of the progress of the nation in civilization have not descended; and that below this line the physical causes of disease and mortality, removed or counteracted in the ordinary progress of civilization, continue to operate with their full force; the shortness of the duration of life, among the classes exposed to them, being universally and invariably the result and the measure of the prevalence and intensity of these causes.

14. That the General Sanatory Measure now presented to Parliament by Her Majesty's Government, is calculated to remove from the classes in question the most prevalent and powerful of these causes, and to bring the very lowest of the people within the influence of that physical and moral improvement which is the necessary consequence of advancing civilization, and in the inestimable benefits of which the higher and middle classes have long participated.

15. That this Measure, involving no political distinction, and influencing no party object, but tending to promote the prosperity and happiness of every class without exception, is one which all parties in both Houses of Parliament may cordially co-operate in perfecting, and all classes out of Parliament unite in securing; its happy distinction being, that while it is capable of effecting a certain amount of good, without the admixture, or even the danger, of any countervailing evil of any kind or degree, immediate or remote, it will at the same time lay the foundation for obtaining other and higher good, absolutely unattainable without it—the advancement (through the improvement of their physical well being) of the intellectual, the moral and the religious progress of the people.

On behalf of the Committee,

ASHLEY, CHAIRMAN.

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